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THE FUTURE LIFE AND THE CONDITION OF MAN THEREIN.—III.

BY THE RIGHT HONORABLE W. E. GLADSTONE.

II.—MAN'S CONDITION IN THE FUTURE LIFE.

I.—The Opinion of Natural Immortality.

THE subject of belief in a future state during the pre-historic and early historic ages affords a spectacle of piteous interest. Mankind, after the lapse into sin, still yearns for the fulfillment of the hopes, once bright and healthful, now impaired and mangled; yet shrinks back in dread from a future which his conscience clothes with terrors, and the prospect beyond the grave is enveloped in such gloom that he clings rather to the brief but often sunny days of his earthly existence.

But the abstract idea of a future life is the mere skeleton of a great subject, which only becomes clothed in flesh and blood, when we introduce into it all the incidents which do or may belong to the condition of man. “Unconditioned possibility” is the description which a powerful writer of our own day has given of the unseen world. The total and sudden rending asunder of the portions of our complex nature, now so closely knit into one another, is a change such that a vast portion of those who have to undergo it never seriously contemplate or mentally apprehend; but when the vision is firmly fixed upon it, there is need, in order to face it, either of profound apathy or of powerful stimulants, or of a great internal strength inherent or acquired. Nature inspires the love of life, cries out against being torn to pieces, and rarely can be brought to accept the idea of pure extinction. The act of dying, which has to be performed by the least among men, is the greatest act in the entire experience of the greatest. The literature of classical antiquity

nowhere makes such piercing calls upon our sympathy as when it laments a beloved object, or mournfully records the inevitable destiny of the race. It is not that the ancients greatly perplex themselves with the ulterior problems, or what we now call eschatology. It is that death is in itself horrible, and old age comes in for a share of horror, because it is death's next neighbor.

But when the greatest of all events in history launched the Gospel into the world a great change was gradually brought about. In the relative importance of the seen and the unseen, the existing and the coming world, a change was wrought amounting to a revolution, and the compromise, which had abated speculation on the future, came spontaneously to an end. On the head and front of the new teaching was written the great doctrine of the Resurrection : and the Resurrection meant an union upon earth with the Life of Christ which was to be perpetuated beyond the grave and consummated by the final resumption of the body. For every redeemed soul a solution of the mystery of death was offered at once immediate and complete ; and the aim of the new dispensation was that every soul should be redeemed ; that as all had shared in the ruin through sin, so all should share in the redemption. And so at the very first outset it seemed to be. Through the first four chapters of the Acts, in the days of the three thousand and the five thousand,* it appears as though not a single tare had been sown by the hand of the enemy among the wheat. In the New Testament generally, until a cloud of uncertainty envelops the episode of the Seven Churches, the Christian community at large is holy and the disobedient are the rare exception. The indefeasible beatitude of believers is not only the happiest, but is also by far the largest object presented to the view. What was in time to become the reverse of the picture was as yet only a speck almost infinitesimal in the spiritual landscape.

From the first, as might have been expected, the happiness without end of man redeemed in Christ, of the very beings such as we see from day to day walking before us, stood as an universal conviction of the Church, and found its place in all the summaries of her belief. Transmigration of the soul, pre-existence, and its absorption, did not require to be confuted ; for Christians they had melted away of themselves as mists before the sun.

* *Acts ii., 41; iv., 4.*

Within these limits Christianity from the first addressed the world in language which was positive and peremptory.

But this happy state of things could not indefinitely continue. With the progressive extension of the Church, the proportion of the branches that abode not in the Vine continually grew. So early as at the date of the Apocalypse there were churches tainted in belief, and churches paralyzed by the lukewarmness which insults God by owning Him while it disobeys Him. Even while the Christian community had the period of persecution still lying in perspective before it, the world, the flesh, and the devil were actively extending their rule within its borders. While the Canon of the New Testament was assuming its form, the sacred books do not appear to have precipitated the mind of the Church into hasty attempts at solving the entire problem of the future state for the wicked in common with the righteous. We shall find that, outside the great revelation of fixed beatitude for holy souls, the question remained an open one for several generations, indeed for some centuries. It would be hazardous to speak with confidence as to the causes which introduced restraint. In such a case as that of the great Trinitarian controversy, it is known that strictness of definition was resorted to as a weapon of defence (and it has proved to be most effectual) against the activity of erratic ideas. In the case of the immortality of the soul, there was no such morbid activity to provoke the general imposition of restraint, and no corresponding danger to guard against.

The conditions under which we approach the consideration of this great subject are widely different from those which were present to the view of the early Christians. For them the question retained a great simplicity. The positive truth of a future life had indeed received authoritative and final confirmation from the mouth of our Lord. As we see from the writings of the Apostolic Fathers that the redeemed of Christ—that is to say, all Christians who would suffer Christ to redeem them—were thenceforward placed in security from all vicissitude by their vital union with Him. “He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live ; and he that liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die.”* He made no declaration as to the origin or nature of the soul. The disquisitions of Rabbis, the speculations of philosophers, were quietly passed by. They remained whatever they had been before,

*John xi., 25, 26.

in their original impotence or power. Passing by them all as naught, he proclaimed the establishment of his own rule, and he denied that it should not be marvelled at, for was it not so by the establishment of the rule of righteousness? "Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."* Large, in proportion to the small volume of his recorded instructions, was the eschatological teaching of our Lord, but it all went straight to the most central and the simplest truths—His mission to draw all men unto Him; the beatitude of those consenting to be drawn, in being one with the Father and the Son; † for those who refuse, a state of darkness, exclusion, weeping and gnashing of teeth, a scene of misery and affliction, on which the curtain of the Gospel drops. That curtain is never lifted: and all that is behind it would seem to be withheld from us and reserved for the counsels of the Most High. And surely if the stony heart of man can be moved, here is enough to move it. On the one hand, rescue from all our evils and all our sins, restoration to a partnership with the Divine nature in the image of which we were originally formed, so that human destinies are in a manner linked to those not of the universe at large, but of the universe at its crown and summit. For this glorious picture, there is of course, a painful and shameful opposite, a Sheol more gloomy than the ancient conception which so largely sufficed to daunt the mind of man before the Advent. By the general declarations of the Gospel, there is open to us for persistent sinners in the future state a wilderness of woe. Yet we cannot say that the fate of the lost is represented to us as an exact counterpart to that of the righteous. So it would have been had the final award been one of pains and pleasures distributed as reward and punishment are administered to school boys and as in a single passage of the gospels future retribution is represented to us under the figure of stripes.‡ But this method of presentation would have thrown into the background the essentially ethical-character of Divine government, and especially of its capital exhibition in the Christian scheme. For the essence of salvation consists not in any external possession, but in vital union with God, such as that of a creature with his

*John v., 28, 29. †John xvii., 21. ‡Luke xii., 47, 48.

Creator can be. There is no Ahriman in the scheme of our religion, and no corresponding existence with which the unrighteous are to be similarly united. Hence there arises in the eschatology of the New Testament an almost uniform distinction in the mode of handling for the two. They are not logical opposites like good and evil. The consumption of the chaff with unquenchable fire is not the logical opposite of being gathered into the garner. Repulsion of the five foolish virgins into a void undescribed is not the logical opposite of a place in the procession of the bridegroom, however the one may be contrasted with the other. The weeping and gnashing of teeth in the outer darkness represents suffering which has its seat and source within the person himself, and are not the logical opposite to that feast where the master of the house supplies his chosen ones with food. Union with God is not only a state, but is also a law, of existence. No corresponding law is defined for us in the New Testament in relation to the lost. Whether or how far the duration of their sufferings is described, I do not at this moment enquire ; but it is not merely or mainly in measures of time that the blessedness of the children of God is meted out to them. "As thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us."* As they do not marry, so neither need they count. Wherever their union with God is named, their charter is given them anew.

"They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, neither can they die any more ; for they are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection."† With death they have and can have no more concern, for "if a man keep my saying he shall never see death."‡ But, on the contrary, in describing the condition of the wicked, death is a familiar image. The wages of sin is death. The motions of sin bear fruit unto death. There is a law of sin and death. Sin, when finished, bringeth forth death.§ And the only question which remains is, whether the word "death" in these and like passages retains its ordinary sense as the cessation of existence, or whether it is here modified to signify a prolongation of existence conditioned by misery. For, do what we will with that word, we cannot sever from it that idea of finality which in one shape or another inheres in its essence.

* John xvii., 21. † Luke xx., 35, 36. ‡ John viii., 51.

§ Rom. vi., 23; vii., 5; viii., 2; 2 Cor. ii., 16; James i., 15.

The instructions of the Apostles added no new doctrine to the teaching of the Saviour in respect to death and retribution, the inalienable beatitude of the just, the absence of any repeal of the sentence pronounced upon the wicked. The same as has been already pointed out was the case with those early writers termed the Apostolic Fathers.

It is only with some care that we can realize the value of this remarkable abstention from the license of speculation, which indeed continued long after the Apostolic age and its special inspiration. Even at a first glance it is easy to conceive what difficulties are likely to attend human attempts to map out the other world when we consider how imperfectly we succeed in our endeavors to master the conditions of the world in which we live, ascertained for us though they be by no small store of experience. First, we have to deal with the origin and essence of the soul, and their relations to those of the body : a subject of itself opening a wide field of varied controversies. Then, it is not one but two future lives with which we have to deal ; the one which precedes the day of judgment, and the other which follows it and reaches out into the infinite. Then there is the difference of the conditions under which the great account is to be met by the generation summoned to it directly from the activities of life, and those other generations who have passed through the natural dissolution of the body and the experiences of the intermediate state. Here the enquirer finds his path crossed by the grave consideration that many pass into the unseen world in infancy and childhood without having reached any such development of the faculties as to attain responsibility, or, in the case of infants, even consciousness. On the borders of this region lie two others yet more vast : What is the condition of those who lived and died before the coming of Christ, and again, of such as dwell beyond the Christian pale and never hear "the word of this salvation ?" How are we to encounter the doubts which suggested to the early Christian mind a division between the *peccatores* who fail to a greater or less extent in their endeavors at the fulfilment of the great Christian law, and the *impii* who do not so much as dream of endeavoring to fulfil it, but accomplish the whole work of their earthly careers in neglect or in defiance. How are to be adjusted the million-shaded gradations of penalty and reward, when the books are opened and the dead are judged according to

their works : the All-seeing Eye taking its measure without fail of every act (and words and thoughts are also acts) done in the body by every individual human being ? What is the place which birth-sin, the death brought by Adam into the world, will occupy in fixing the conditions of the dread account ? Or again. The Christian was not redeemed in loneliness : he had been baptized into a community, and membership in that community established a relation which, under the circumstances of the early Christian Church, went down to the very roots of his being, and appeared sometimes to obtain such a command that the soul, when thoroughly vitalized by Divine grace, appeared to experience an absorption of all personal cares in the depth and intensity of its sympathies ? As when St. Paul wrote those wonderful words : "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."* In these subjects and in others such as these, was open a field for inquiry and for dispute which might almost be called infinite. But the flights of thought were wider and wilder still when two hundred years after the time of our Lord we find ourselves face to face with the controversies of Origenism.

There was there a wise abstention from feverish inquiries which could only tend to the premature and inordinate pursuit of dogma, or the exaltation of mere opinion to a plane on which it acquires the semblance of authority. It was aided by a variety of influences. First the early Christian writers were not generally of a stamp addicted to mere theory, but were eminently practical. Reality and fervor were then the rule of Christian life and not as now the exception ; so that the happy consequence of such a state of things was that the contemplation of the coming world, the main object presented to the view was that blessed and happy one which had already received from our Lord such fullness of description as was found amply to satisfy the general mind, and to throw the sadder portion of the question comparatively into the shade. And further, we must take into view the wide prevalence among the early Christians of a belief in the early return of the Saviour to the world for a victorious reign thereover and with His people for a thousand years. It seems evident that as under the Mosaic system the forward place given to temporal inducements and penalties

* Rom. ix., 3.

tended to cast a shade over the entire question of a future life, so the millennial anticipations of a public and general triumph of the Lord in person upon earth together with his church must have operated powerfully in neutralizing the solicitude of Christians for very large solutions of the questions associated with eschatology, and may have caused something approaching to an absorption of the ideas concerning the particulars of individual destiny in the majestic and imposing imagery of expectation thus offered to the spiritual eye. For here it should be observed that the millennarian or chiliastic expectations were calculated to exercise a peculiar force of attraction. The grand expectation of St. Paul in connection with the coming life was "to be with Christ"; but this was the central and cardinal idea of Chiliasm. Again it met the weakness of human nature half way in abating the magnitude of the changes entailed by death; for the Christian would be still in his old home, and if that home was to present an altered, it was also to be a happier and a nobler, aspect. Further this state adjourned the awfulness which it is hard wholly to sever from the great account; for it preceded the Day of Judgment. Along with that great day, the chiliastic expectation adjourned what was to follow it; and by interposing this subject of adequate and indeed absorbing interest between the present life and the ultimate determination of the fate of souls a powerful means was provided for slackening the curiosity of the human mind with respect to that ultimate question. Origen, as we might naturally expect, is found among the opponents of Chiliasm.

Upon the whole and as regards the early church at large, I submit that we may view its mental condition with regard to eschatology as a very happy condition, and as distinguished mainly by the union of these three special notes: a pure faith, a modest self-restraint and a large range of freedom for opinion.

These ideas were in close conformity with all the best of our natural conceptions. Through the deviation of man from his righteousness, there had been a frightful rent established in the web of this earthly dispensation. The teaching of our Lord, and the purpose of His Incarnation, both in His Person, and in His Church which has been described as its continuation, aimed at the reparation of this rent by re-establishing the reign of righteousness; and this reign of righteousness was at once fully,

clearly, and simply expressed in the primitive eschatology which set aside all the flights of metaphysical abstraction, and simply assigned to goodness its reward and to wickedness its proper retribution : with an adequate consistency and precision as to the first, and with a becoming awe, and consequent reserve, as to all the particulars of the latter.

This description will best apply to the period which extends from the Apostolic age down to the time of Origen. With regard to this period, the English speaking student does not, indeed, receive all the help he might desire (so far as I know) from writers in his own tongue. Dr. Salmond's "Christian Doctrine of Immortality"** is an able, truth-loving, and, from many points of view, comprehensive work ; but it does not supply any history of the course and variation of Christian opinion during the centuries since the Advent. The still fuller work of Mr. Alger, which in 1878 had gone through ten editions in the United States, is open to graver exception in this respect, that it proounds a "patristic scheme of eschatology," † as representing the teachings of the Church from the first to the tenth century ; whereas it is generally recognized and appears indisputable that great changes in the tone of principal writers took place during that lengthened period. The "punishment of the wicked by both physical and spiritual torture" without any respite, without any end,‡ was during the earlier generations denied by many, but was from the first the orthodox doctrine of the patristic Church. The common representations are different and I believe nearer the truth. According to F. Nitzsch, the immortality of the soul was the subject of free discussion among the early Fathers. In Justin Martyr we find it denied (and though the denial be put into the mouth of Trypho, an independent witness, it is inconceivable that this could have been done if Justin himself had believed that question to be closed in a contrary sense by Divine Revelation). Tatian says in express terms, the soul of man in itself is not immortal but mortal ; and Theophilus of Antioch that Adam was neither mortal nor immortal, but (*δακτικὸς ἀμφοτέρων*) capable of either. And according to Irenaeus the soul in its own nature is not life, but receives its life from God, on whom therefore its

* Edinburgh, Clark, 1895.

† Alger, "Doctrine of a Future Life," page 395-8.

‡ Ibid, page 402.

continuance depends. It is subject to the law of death, but will owe persistency of life, as a Divine gift, to God its author. At a later date Lactantius even says that the distinction between the righteous and the wicked would be cancelled if all were immortal* *Ergo immortalitas non sequela naturæ, sed merces præmium qui virtutis est.* On the other hand, Tertullian teaches that the soul is indivisible and imperishable, and has an activity which is not suspended even during sleep. Dodwell in his work on the soul, claims also Rufinus, Arnobius and Athenagoras as supporters of the doctrine of mortality.† Clarke's denials of these are bold, but by no means in all cases absolute or satisfactory.‡ The author of *Problème de l' Immortalité*, an elaborate work§ on behalf of "conditional immortality," includes in his claim Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Hermas, Polycarp, and Clement of Alexandria. Flügge in dealing with the period before Origen points out that there was as yet no dogma of the Church upon the subject; some affirmed punishments to be eternal, others regarded the souls of the wicked as destined to annihilation; in general writers did not go beyond the declarations of the New Testament, nor venture to lift the curtain which hangs over all that follows the Day of Judgment, considering that there is then opened a fresh period in the history of the race which it is beyond the prerogative of mortal man to examine.¶ Enough I think has now been said to sustain my general proposition that this period was one of faith, of freedom, and of personal moderation and reserve: although I have not yet referred to what is the clearest and most indisputable evidence in its support, namely, the language of the Creeds. That language shows that the general characteristics which I have assigned to the writers before the time of Origen extended beyond that period, so far as the authoritative standards of the Church at large are concerned.

The secret of this mental freedom, the condition which made it possible, was the absence from the scene of any doctrine of a natural immortality inherent in the soul. Absent, it may be

* F. Nitzsch, *Grundriss der Christlichen Dogmageschichte*, Berlin, 1870; pp. 352, 3; I. Theil. Quoting respectively Just. Dial. c. 4; Tatian c. Graec. 13; Theophilus ad Antol. II., 27; Iren., II. 34, 4; Lactantius *Inst. Div.*, vii., 5.

† "The Soul a Principle Naturally Mortal," pp. 55, 67, 76, 79.

‡ Letter to Mr. Dodwell, pp. 24 to 47.

§ *Problème de l' Immortalité*, Vol. ii., p. 286. Paris, 1842.

¶ Flügge, *Geschichte des Glaubens an Unsterblichkeit*, Leipzig, 1799, Theil., III. Abs. I., page 237.

termed, for all practical purposes, until the third century ; for, though it was taught by Tertullian in connection with the Platonic ideas, it was not given forth as belonging to the doctrine of Christ or his Apostles. It was held by Tertullian in connection with the contention that the soul was material in its nature, an idea very unlikely to recommend it to the Christian mind. And the association of Tertullian with Montanism could hardly be otherwise than detrimental to his influence; as indeed it seems to have left him through the long course of ages afloat, so to speak, between the opposite characters of patristic honors and the brand of heresy. It seems to me as if it were from the time of Origen that we are to regard the idea of natural, as opposed to that of Christian, immortality as beginning to gain a firm foothold in the Christian Church.

And now, indeed, in connection with that great name, it may be thought that we are no longer entitled to speak of moderation and reserve as characteristics of the prevailing tone of Christian thought. The opinion for which he is now most generally known to have been finally condemned is that which is called Restorationism or Universalism ; an opinion which harmonizes with and perhaps presupposes the natural immortality of the soul. But the idea of restoration was only one amidst a crowd of his notions, all of which had the natural immortality of the soul for their common ground.

In the range of his reading, which largely exceeded that of any among his predecessors, Origen became well acquainted with the arguments of Gentile philosophy, and probably with every extant branch of learning. He was a great Apologist of Christianity, and it is supposed that he did not consciously alienate himself from its traditional teaching. Yet he himself suspected that his eschatology was one dangerous for the multitude, and it is suggested that he cherished the notion of having an exoteric theology for the mass of believers and a esoteric system for the student. A curious passage is cited by Lups from Saint Jerome : *Ipse Origenes, in epistola quam scribit ad Fabianum, Romanae Ecclesiæ Episcopum, pœnitentiam agit, cur talia scripserit, et causam temeritatis in Ambrosium refert, quod secreto edita in publicum protulerit.** It was indeed the opening of a flood-gate. I think that the importance of the men who took opposite sides

* Lups, page 706. Jerom. Epist. lxv., c. 4.

in the long period of Origenistic controversy lends great support to the statement I have ventured that outside the strictly essential there had been a large freedom allowed to eschatological opinion in the early Church. On the other hand, speaking as a remote and ignorant observer, I am struck with astonishment on finding that this great man, so deeply immersed in practical controversy, should have found mental leisure for these far-travelling speculations. They seem, as to many of their subjects, like balloon-voyages undertaken into vacant space by one who found the atmospheric spaces contiguous to the earth insufficient for his expatiating energies. Flügge views him * as governed by a conviction that he could build out of philosophy, especially out of Platonism, buttresses for the Christian faith and proofs of its solidity ; a view in marked contrast with that chosen by the most circumspect minds, and by Butler, a prince among them.

The sceptical mind may frame questions as it will : Death sternly refuses to give it any satisfaction. The love of money may heap around us mountains of gold ; all this is but to lower the ratio of that which a man is, to that which he possesses. The fever of self-indulgence may multiply our enjoyments : but each new enjoyment is, for the common run of men, a new want, and each new want is a new link in the chain of moral servitude, a new deduction from our high prerogative of freedom. Schemes of negation may each for a while fret and fume upon the stage of human affairs. It is Death, the great auditor of accounts, that reduces them, one and all, to their natural and small dimensions. The present is louder than ever in its imperious demands ; but injured nature takes it upon her to reply that the present is the life of animals, and the future is the life of man. In the development of luxury, we are immeasurably ahead of the ancient Greek, and we might have been proportionably more successful in shutting off the questionings of the soul respecting that which is to come, had not a new voice sounded forth in the world to proclaim the word Resurrection : since which it has become impossible, by any process within our resources, to stifle the longings of the human spirit to obtain the command of some instrument for measuring the future which expands before it.

I suppose it to be an acknowledged fact that for the Apostles, and for the first following teachers of Christianity, the doctrine of

* Flügge's *Geschichte*, Theil. III., Abs. v. (iv., 171).

the Resurrection lay at the very threshold of the Gospel. It was a salient proof, of matchless force for the new scheme that, whereas the great enemy to be destroyed, according to the ancient promise, was Death, Death was at once and visibly destroyed by the Resurrection. Moreover, it was the road toward the solution of that cloud of mysterious problems which lay spread all round the idea of our own future life. It might have been imagined, then, that as the Resurrection was the first word of the Gospel, the handling of these mysteries would be the next. But no. The teaching which at once travelled so far into the darkness before us as the Resurrection, forthwith travelled back from it. It came back, in due order, from the Resurrection which lay on the farther side of the grave, to the resurrection which lies on the hither side. Under the Christian system, destinies depend upon character ; and it is the character which has to be formed here which will shape the destinies that are to be undergone hereafter. It might almost be said without levity that the early Christians set about the work of character, and left destiny to take care of itself.

The weight of interest attached to formation of character, immensely exceeded for practical purposes the interest of investigation into the particulars of the future existence, and the Church for some time gave an absorbing attention to the duty which lay nearest hand. Even those who view with least favor the unbounded speculations of Origen must regret that, if his works were to be condemned by binding authority, they should not have been brought to judgment until three centuries after his death (from about A. D. 254 to 553). He was a lover of truth, and if they had been tried in his life-time he might in deference to such high authority have reconsidered his positions, and have found means of greatly narrowing the interval which separated him from the general mind of the Church. While the question may suggest itself whether his opinions might and ought to have been dealt with sooner, it should be remembered on the other hand that during these three hundred years, beginning with the time of Paul of Samosata, the Church had gone through the most perilous and agitated period of its whole existence, and had dealt with and settled once for all the controversies, larger and more vital even than those of eschatology, which concerned the nature of the Object of our worship. The last echoes of those transcendent controversies only died away contemporaneously with the

condemnation of Origenism, and in association with the name of the Roman Pope Vigilius. But the point which I desire to press is this. The immortality of the soul had heretofore been a question open and little agitated. The complex group of opinions termed Origenistic had been founded on it. The opinions were condemned. Of the immortality of the soul there was neither condemnation nor approval. But as in this way notoriety was given to it without censure, the practical effect may have been largely to accredit it, and this may have operated in conjunction with other causes to promote that extension of the opinion which had apparently been in progress from the time of St. Augustine.

It would be out of place were I to present the summaries of Origenistic tenets or hypotheses which may easily be found on reference.* They are set out with authority in the Canons of the Fifth Council from I. to IX., in the last of which he is named † and anathematised. It is enough to say that, besides speculations of a peculiar kind on the nature and redeeming office of our Lord, they included the pre-existence of the soul, and the universal restitution to righteousness and felicity of all mankind, a proposition which with inflexible and fearless logic he carried to its farthest bounds, and included in it Satan and the fallen angels. He was condemned during his lifetime by an Alexandrian synod, and the condemnation was echoed from Rome, but the grounds of it are not known with clear certainty. But his defenders, too, were strong in number, character, and influence, so that the Church exhibited a divided mind. His vast learning and ability, as well as his elevated reputation for sanctity, may have greatly contributed to the amount and vivacity of the support which he received. For some time, after the Council of Chalcedon, there was a lull, but a recrudescence followed, and Origenism became apparently the occasion as well as one of the main subjects of the General Council held at Constantinople in A. D. 553.

Even down to and after the time of Gregory the Great, Flügge finds no approach made towards the formation of a Christian dogma of eschatology. There was a disposition to dwell on the immateriality of the soul, but it was regarded as in its own nature

* For example, in the "Dictionary of Christian Biography," IV., 150 and 154. The article on Origen amounts to a highly developed treatise.

† Lupus *Canones et Decreta*, pages 660, 270.

perishable, and as deriving immortality only from the knowledge of God.* Still he considers, and it seems indisputable, that the materials for such an opinion, whether we call it dogma or hypothesis, were for a long period in course of steady accumulation, but this was not so from the first. After some generations, however, the mental temper and disposition of Christians inclined more and more to its reception were also on the increase. Without these assumptions it would be impossible to account for the wholesale change which has taken place in the mind of Christendom with regard to the subject of natural immortality. It would be difficult, I think, to name any other subject connected with religious belief (though not properly belonging to it) on which we can point to so sweeping and absolute a revolution of opinion: from the period before Origen, when the idea of an immortality properly natural was almost unknown, to the centuries of the later middle ages and of the modern age, when, at least in the West, it had become practically undisputed and universal. Let us endeavor to obtain so much of light as we may upon the causes which were auxiliary to this extraordinary change.

I have ventured on referring to Origenism and even to its condemnation as one among them, on the ground that it brought the general mind into familiarity with the idea previously alien or remote. In the wake of Origen came Platonism, of which he was a zealous champion. At the period when Dante sang, Aristotle had long held that unquestioned sway which is commemorated in the line

Vidi il maestro di color che sanno. †

But Plato had been supreme in Alexandria; and Alexandria was the parent of Christian philosophy in the persons of Clement and of Origen. He had also a high place in the mind of St. Augustine, and he probably did more among Christians, than he had ever achieved among pagans, in establishing as a natural endowment that immortality of the soul which was already ineradicably fixed as fact for Christian souls, although upon a ground altogether different in the mind of the Church, so far as it touched the destination of the righteous. In all these ages, Christianity was in the West a rapidly growing religion; the extension of the Christian revelation gave a powerful impetus

* Flügge *Geschichte*, Theil III., Abs. V. (iv. 234-6).

† Dante Inf. IV., 131.

to what I may term the spirit of affirmation; and with the spirit of affirmation, the arguments and the temper of Platonism intimately coincided. The system of Aristotle on the other hand was distinctly negative in the matter of what is now called the Beyond; but the view of immortality congenial to Platonism had, before this rival system became prevalent, so hardened in the Christian mind that it took no damage from the change brought about in philosophy at large.

By an unwarranted assumption, we are too much wont to antedate the transition of the mass of the population of the Empire from heathenism to Christianity. There is of course an utter dearth of sound statistical information on the subject. It is probable that Constantine, when he took the side of Christianity, saw that the balance of the aggregate mental and moral forces had altered in the same direction, but the question of mere numbers is one altogether different. Even in Constantinople, a century after it had been founded "under the inspiration of anti-pagan ideas," Beugnot shows that only one-fourth of the population were Christians.* The Christian policy of the great Emperor was rather an anticipation of the coming time, than an acknowledgment of results already achieved. The world was not yet reconciled to the Church. But that reconciliation was on its way; it travelled fast; and, as it advanced, the powers of the world acquired a growing influence within her borders. The proportion of her thoughtless and godless members to those of serious mind continually and rapidly grew. From the reign of Constantine onwards, says Beugnot, we note the disappearance of those simple and frugal manners, which for three centuries had been the glory of the Church.† So the warfare of the genuine Christian preacher with large numbers of his hearers waxed hotter and hotter. The question of their destiny in the world to come, which had been but infinitesimal in the first Apostolic days, now came to assume grave, and even vast, proportions. And here it was that the new doctrine, as I shall call it, of natural immortality played so material a part. The sinner had to be persuaded. He had also to be threatened; and threatened with what? If the preacher only menaced him with the retribution which was to follow the

* Beugnot, *Destruction du Paganisme en Occident*, II., 195.
† Beugnot I., 87.

Day of Judgment, the force of the instrument he employed materially depended on what he could say as to the duration of that penal term, a subject which, in the earliest teaching of the Church, it had been found unnecessary minutely to explore. But the war was carried on from the pulpit at a great advantage, for the age was an affirming and believing, not a questioning or denying age. At such a period the more long-drawn the vista of the impending punishment, the more powerful the menaces with which the preacher might reckon upon beating down the resistance of the carnal mind. In an age which has reversed the tendencies of thought, the doctrine of natural immortality may have become, for many or some, an impediment or incumbrance. But, in what we term the ages of faith, ideas of a natural immortality, even if rudely and indefinitely conceived, enhanced the power of the leverage at the command of the Christian preacher. It seems also indisputable that it enhanced therewith the influence of the priesthood as a caste ; and the sharper the edge which could be given to the configuration (so to speak) of the opinion, the greater was that enhancement : and the larger the increment of a force which in its first inception was evidently one calculated for use in the cause of righteousness, although in its ulterior developments, and in its association with another evolution of ideas concerning the intermediate state and the power of the Church to act upon it, the moral action of the tenet may have come to be of a mixed and questionable character. If, then, the idea of natural immortality was one thus variously adapted for promoting, under the circumstances of the time, both the higher and the more earthly part of the purposes of the Church, we cannot doubt that this doctrinal interest would have a large and efficacious operation in promoting the recognition, acceptance and habitual popular enforcement of that idea.

It seems, however, to be generally felt that the determining epoch in the history of seminal Christian thought upon this subject was the life of St. Augustine, together with that period, following closely upon it, when the Western Church became rapidly imbued with his theology in almost its entire compass.

It would be difficult, I believe, to frame from the writings of this great teacher, the most powerful, the most evangelical, and also the most comprehensive who had adorned the annals of the

Western Church, any entirely self-consistent system of eschatological opinion. Some questions, such as whether suffering in the future will be physical as well as spiritual, he was content to leave open. It has been shown by the language already quoted from the *Retractationes* how he felt the difficulties of such a theme. The views which he expressed in connection with primitive man and with the fall seem to be at variance with the endeavors, doubtless due to his acceptance of the Platonic philosophy, which he made to found the immortality of the soul upon abstract and metaphysical considerations. Probably these arguments supplied the basis of his own conviction. His strong conception, however, of the Divine decrees, of birth-sin, and (in his later days) of the utter impotence of the will to act rightly, may all have tended to give, in his mind, more and more of fixity and permanence to the conditions of human existence. These views did not pass without some mitigation into the general teaching of the Latin Church. But the conclusion as to the soul met with general acceptance and suffered no abatement in its terms. From this time forward we cease to look for the appearance of men who, like Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century, recalled the memory of Origen with regard to the escape in the future of lost spirits from their condemnation.* For Augustine strongly supported the eternal duration of their punishment. This is not surprising; but it may appear singular that he should have recognized such a parallelism between this opinion and the perpetuity of everlasting happiness, as to suggest that the doctrine touching the redeemed would be endangered unless the other were propounded as its counterpart. The eternal punishment of the wicked in general for the sins of a life not finite only but brief is thought by some to present an aspect of great severity. When this proposition carried with it the notions of inability to escape from sinfulness, and of adverse Divine decrees, and when, further, damnation for original sin was extended to infants, and the heathen were excluded wholesale from salvation, it may be said that a theology so fashioned did indeed hold heavy burdens for the human mind to bear. We are now perhaps suffering, in part, from the reaction which such a scheme might be calculated in the course of time to bring about.

* F. Nitzsch *Dogmageschichte* I., p. 404.

It will not be required to say much more upon the historical growth of this opinion. Flügge regards the ideas of immateriality and immortality of the soul as accepted by St. John of Damascus, but considers that all along the Latin Church led the way in this development.* The history of the formation of the ecclesiastical dogma (of eschatology), he says, closes with the Schoolmen.† To their manipulation of the subject there is no corresponding process among the divines of the Oriental Church, who remained content with the older methods of presentation. It may have been a sign of this distinction between Western and Eastern doctrine that so late as in the *Decretum pro Graecis* (the words accepted by the Council of Florence as a form of union in 1439), it is declared that those who have died *in actuali mortali peccato, vel solo originali* pass into punishments of various degrees, but nothing is said of the duration of those punishments.

We are to regard Peter Lombard, it appears, as the person who gathered together the *disjecta membra*; and even from him the words are quoted, *omnibus questionibus quae de hac removeri solent, satisfacere non valeo.*‡ With the Schoolmen, the philosophy of Aristotle was established in full authority; but Peter Lombard found the natural immortality of the soul in possession of the field of thought, and, perhaps, accepted it simply as part of the common heritage, without minute investigation of the source from which it was derived. Flügge quotes him as content to set out from the Resurrection, which he proves by the authority of Scripture. It was his business to give regularity and method to the dispersed utterances of former writers; and this he appears to have done with a certain moderation. Following St. Augustine and Gregory the Great, he described the satisfaction which the sufferings of the wicked will supply to the elect; *laetitia satiabuntur, agentes gratias de sua liberatione, vita impiorum ineffabili calamitate.*§ Their utility, therefore, lies in quickening the thankfulness of the blessed for their own relief, though the question remains whether so sad a stimulant can under the circumstances be required, or should be gratuitously presumed.

One historical point only remains.

At length, in the year 1513, in a Bull of Pope Leo X.,

* Flügge, Theil III., Abs. IV. (iv., 214). † *Ibid.* Abs. VII. u. IV.
‡ *Ibid.*, Abs. VIII. (iv., 69). § *Ibid.*, p. 69-79.

which purports to be issued with the assent of a Lateran Council (which, however, has been questioned) we have the following words: *Damnamus et reprobamus omnes asserentes animam intellectivam mortalem esse, aut unicam in cunctis hominibus.**

I do not know how far this Bull is within the prescriptions of the Council of 1870 ; but whether it binds the Latin communion or not it is of interest as an historical document, and as one which stands in isolation.

But although it was the work of the Schoolmen to supply the Western Church with its formal eschatology, it seems to be generally agreed that the motive force of paramount efficacy in this direction was drawn from the works of St. Augustine. So we find ourselves brought down in substance to the modern ideas, meaning, however, by these the ideas which prevailed from the Reformation onwards, and reserving for a later stage whatever in the way of shock or change is to be ascribed to the sceptical or negative movement of the present day. So the spectacle which we have before us is in brief outline this. The reserve of the early Church has been abandoned. Even the recollection of it has faded from the popular mind. Of the immeasurable field of discussion opened by the future life, not indeed the whole, but a considerable part, had been virtually closed, not by ecclesiastical authority in its most formal sense, but yet by the general drift of the mind of Christendom, long before the judgment of Leo X. was promulgated. The Western tone had prevailed over the Eastern ; for the East had hardly refreshed its theology by reproductions since the time of John of Damascus. With the departure of the ancient reserve there had come a great practical limitation of the liberty of thought possessed by the individual Christian. The doctrine of natural as distinguished from Christian immortality had not been subjected to the severe tests of wide publicity and resolute controversy, but had crept into the Church by a back door as it were, by a silent though effective process, and was in course of obtaining a title by tacit prescription.

The evidence of the change may perhaps be most readily supplied to us by observing that when arguments are offered for the immortality of the soul they are rarely derived from Scripture.†

*From the *Bullarium* of Sixtus V., Romae, 1586, p. 171.
† Flügge, Theil III. Abs. I., Abs. V., (IV., 3 ii).

For it will be borne in mind that logically viewed resurrection is one thing and immortality another. The duration of the sufferings of the wicked was universally deemed to be co-extensive with the beatitude of the righteous. But there remained one distinction on which we may have to dwell at a later stage. The human mind had become familiar with the name of eternity, but had dived little into the idea itself. There had not yet been, in conjunction with the acceptance and enforcement of the phrase, any corresponding attempt by arithmetical calculation or otherwise to give it with any fullness the character which it bears in recent thought.

It remains to consider with some fullness the effect of these grave changes, and especially of the substitution in our eschatology on a larger scale of assertion for reserve.

W. E. GLADSTONE.

(*To be continued.*)